


News Analysis

How the Jalisco Cartel Evolved with Mexico's Drug War

Details

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 Tuesday, 14 October 2014

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In the competitive and ever-changing environment of Mexico

A narco-message signed by the Jalisco Cartel

(<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/9-mexico>)'s drug trade, groups like the CJNG and the Knights Templar have kept their position by adopting a regional strategy, rather than expanding across the country. The fact that the CJNG is still growing highlights its adaptability, and willingness to adopt a vigilante discourse when necessary.

In recent years, each Mexican criminal organization has had to adapt itself to the militarization of public security and the privatization of violence, which have sent more federal forces onto the streets and led to better-armed cartels.

The Jalisco Cartel - New Generation (CJNG) and the Knights Templar in Michoacan were formed in a period in which the environment was so adverse that one could say that they have survived almost through a process of natural selection.

For their part, the Knights perfected a model of extortion (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/45-extortion>) and infiltration of the authorities at the local and state level, which led to the uprising of the Michoacan self-defense groups and ultimately to the weakening of the cartel itself. Meanwhile, their rivals in the CJNG have continued to adapt well to the changing environment.

The CJNG arose after the 2010 death of Jalisco "Nacho" Coronel ([news-analysis/the-kingspin-strategy-nacho](#)) led a fight for

succession. The CJNG won in large part because of its solid ties with the Milenio Cartel (<http://www.am.com.mx/notareforma/10458>), also known as the Cartel of the Valencia brothers, an old criminal structure that dominated Michoacan until the year 2000.

For several years it was thought that the Milenio Cartel had been dismantled. However, the leadership of the CJNG by a Michoacan native like Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes (<http://www.unionjalisco.mx/articulo/2014/01/31/seguridad/guadalajara/el-mencho-el-grullo-su-favorito>), alias "El Mencho," or his son Ruben, illustrates the powerbase left by Milenio. The structures that the group left behind (resources, networks, etc.) have become key in the development of the CJNG. Likewise, the Familia Michoacana, another organization thought to have been dismantled, is key for understanding the origin of the self-defense groups ([news-analysis/el-chayo-dead-but-knights-templars-war-with-vigilante-militias-rages-on](#)).

SEE ALSO: Mexico's Security Dilemma: Michoacan's Militias (/investigations/mexico-michoacan-vigilantes)

Not even the arrest of key figures has been able to interrupt the CJNG's regional expansion: it has continued to consolidate in Jalisco, despite the detention of Ruben Oseguera (/news-briefs/mexico-captures-cjng-leader-investigates-links-with-vigilantes), alias "El Menchito," thought to be second-in-command of the group.

In fact, the CJNG's links with Jalisco help explain its success. It is difficult for any criminal group to repeat the Knights Templars' pervasive infiltration of Michoacan's institutions (/news-briefs/mexico-governor-resigns-amid-accusations-of-family-ties-to-knights-templar), but neighboring Jalisco offers alternative options for the expansion of a criminal organization.

The state capital, Guadalajara, is a stable environment. It is one of Mexico's three main cities, but lacks the institutional presence of Mexico City (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/9-mexico>), or the state of flux Monterrey's criminal environment (/investigations/zetas-monterrey) has seen in recent years.

To this is added the historic presence in Jalisco of some of the most important drug trafficking groups (the Guadalajara network, the Sinaloa Cartel (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/63-sinaloa-cartel>), and the Milenio Cartel), which means that there is, presumably, local know-how on money laundering (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/22-money-laundering>), frontmen and other things that are necessary for the criminal economy. As the dominant group, the CJNG can take advantage of these. One example is the Bahia Banderas region, which includes the cities of Nayarit and Jalisco, and whose money laundering (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/22-money-laundering>) potential was demonstrated by the fugitive Caro Quintero (<http://www.vallartauno.com/index.php/columnas/selecciones-del-editor/item/429-las-propiedades-de-caro-quintero-en-bb-convertidas-en-fraccionamientos-y-proyectos-inmobiliarios>). Tourist site Puerto Vallarta was mentioned by the Jalisco Attorney General's Office (<http://www.noticiaspv.com/cartel-de-jalisco-nueva-generacion-con-presencia-en-pv-najera/>) as a place where the CJNG has a significant presence, as was the Sierra Occidental, where a mayor was murdered (/news-briefs/mexico-mayor-death-jalisco-cartel) in August.

Jalisco also allows easy access to various commercial zones like Manzanillo (Colima state), and the Michoacan port of Lazaro Cardenas, which are key for methamphetamine trafficking (/news-briefs/mexico-seizes-18-tons-meth-chemicals-shipped-from-india).

From the security of Jalisco, the CJNG has constructed a regional strategy, in a corridor that includes not just Michoacan but Nayarit, Colima and Guerrero (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vOR2mbLwdU>). Its strength seems to have served to attract individuals from this area who are linked to the Sinaloa Cartel (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/63-sinaloa-cartel>).

The surprising thing about the CJNG is that its successful strategy of consolidation as a regional power is accompanied by an aptitude for using violence in diverse ways that are naturally integrated with its objectives.

One of its most significant acts of violence was the use of a group known as the Mata Zetas (Zeta-Killers) (/news-analysis/the-zeta-killers-and-the-rise-of-narco-horror) to strike surgically planned, propagandistic blows in zones that were disputed with the Zetas (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/20-zetas>), like Veracruz. Afterwards they withdrew this brand, or, according to some sources, dismantled the force (<http://www.reporteindigo.com/reporte/articulo/cartel-jalisco-nueva-generacion-entre-fracturas-y-guerras>) because of its negative impact on public opinion.

SEE ALSO: Mexico News and Profiles (/mexico-organized-crime-news)

It is noteworthy that the organization has the capacity to move from these actions, vaguely inspired by paramilitarism (/news-analysis/drug-war-not-causing-surge-of-paramilitaries-in-mexico), to direct confrontation with the army. This is demonstrated by its various ambushes, such as a May attack in which four soldiers were killed (/news-briefs/ambush-of-mexico-soldiers-reminder-of-jalisco-cartels-power) in Jalisco.

Meanwhile, in Michoacan, the CJNG has sought alliances with the security forces. With its intervention in the conflict between the self-defense groups and the Knights Templar (/news-analysis/michoacan-guerrero-and-mexicos-mixed-response-to-the-vigilantes), the Jalisco Cartel identified a highly publicized conflict, infiltrated it, and used its resources to help the authorities and the self-defense groups, with the common aim of weakening the Knights.

Its flexible attitude to the use of violence is complemented by its vigilante-style discourse. For example, it has demonstrated the capacity to adopt the authorities' own narrative about the organizations identified as most harmful under each presidency. In the face of the Zetas (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/20-zetas>), the

CJNG offered its Mata Zetas (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/20-zetas>) (Zeta-Killers). Faced with the Knights Templar, they framed themselves as “mata-templarios” (Templar-Killers).

The convergence of the CJNG's objectives with those of the security forces suggests that the “war on drugs” has pushed criminal organizations to use counterinsurgency discourses in order to strengthen themselves and gain legitimacy, something seen in a more developed form in the Colombian context (</news-analysis/bacrim-return-to-paramilitary-roots-in-colombia-land-battle>). It also indicates the extent to which security forces and drug traffickers collaborate in some way to take down the criminal groups perceived as most dangerous.

The rise of regional organizations like the CJNG is the result of a period in which cartels face many difficulties in consolidating at a national level. Groups that become the focus of the authorities' attention (</news-analysis/why-mexicos-zetas-expanded-faster-rivals>) because of their expansion, like the Zetas (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/20-zetas>), end up fragmented due to actions against them by the security forces. Meanwhile, organizations that tend to coexist with local groups, like the Sinaloa Cartel (<http://www.insightcrime.org/component/tags/tag/63-sinaloa-cartel>), leave intact the tools by which the smaller groups can reclaim their autonomy, as happened in Jalisco after the death of Coronel. For that reason it looks unlikely that there will be a new hegemony in Mexican drug trafficking, like the one held by Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo in the previous century (</news-analysis/how-mexicos-traffickers-became-violent>), via the Guadalajara network.

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